

Planning for Tourism

- Does your community want or need to diversify its local economic base?
- Does your community have natural resource-based industries that have declined?
- Does your community want to maintain the natural environment and quality of life that it has traditionally enjoyed?

If so, you may consider promoting tourism in your community.

Why Do It?

As one of the largest sectors of the economy, tourism can greatly increase a community's opportunities. It can take advantage of your community's existing resources, such as its natural environment, historic attractions, traditions, or hospitality. Tourism provides diverse opportunities for visitors to enjoy new or educational experiences and hospitality services which are centered around a real or perceived rural way of life. These can occur through trips to a specific rural area or attraction or by travel through a rural area as part of a larger itinerary.

Benefits

- Tourism creates new jobs and businesses
- It brings in new dollars from outside the community for existing businesses
- It can add to the tax base that supports community services
- It can raise land values by increasing demand for rural land
- It can often be accomplished with few additional demands on local services

Drawbacks

Tourism is not for every community. Some communities do not have the resources, attractions, or amenities that would draw visitors. Tourism can be complicated and risky in certain situations and can sometimes involve major investments in improving infrastructure. Some communities may not want to deal with such problems as increased congestion, crime or growth that tourism can bring. As a result, communities must carefully consider whether tourism is an economic development option that would work for them and what types of tourism they wish to develop.

Types of Tourists

As you consider tourism possibilities, think about reasons why people might visit your community:

- On vacation
- On business trips or attending conventions
- Visiting amusement parks and attractions
- Participating in a sports event (skiing, canoeing, sailing, etc.)
- Sight-seeing and visiting historic attractions
- Visiting friends and relatives
- Passing through en route to another location
- Attending a special event (rodeo, play, musical event, festival, etc.)

How to Begin

A carefully planned tourism strategy will help you maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of developing rural tourism. You may be able to contract with a state government or other agency with responsibility for tourism if your community does not have the time or resources to do this.

1. Define Goals/Objectives: Before your community can begin to attract tourism, it must clarify its goals and objectives. This assessment will help target the appropriate type of tourism. What kind of community do you want to have? How can tourism help achieve this goal?

2. Identify Existing Resources/Attractions: Managing natural, human and financial resources is an important component of tourism development. Most communities have existing resources and attractions that can draw visitors. Conduct an inventory of the things that your community has to offer to tourists. Describe each type of attraction in terms of quality and quantity. Separate them by "core elements" or primary reasons tourists are attracted and "secondary elements" or supporting resources or those that contribute positively to the tourists' travel experience. When possible, get help from knowledgeable outsiders, such as tour and bus operators, travel clubs and recreation developers. They may see opportunities you are unaware of.

3. Build Local Support: Tourism requires support and one way to gain it is by informing and educating the community. Introduce the idea of tourism to the Chamber of Commerce, civic clubs, city council, or other community organizations. The community and its leaders can broaden support for tourism by securing financial commitments from public and private sources.

4. Analyze Feasibility/Impacts: The pros and cons of tourism development in rural America are numerous. Tourism provides new income and diversification to rural communities. Most of the dollars generated from outside visitors stay within the local economy. Many indirect benefits can also be realized from tourism. Visitors contribute to the tax revenues collected and can influence the quality of life by financing community facilities such as swimming pools, golf courses, restaurants, and shopping facilities. Community events intended for tourists can also serve local residents. Most potential industries prefer locations that provide high quality services and recreational resources for their employees. If the community is a pleasant place, the visitor may become a permanent resident.

On the other hand, developing and maintaining a tourist industry requires added costs and may put additional pressure on public services or natural resources. The cost of surveys, impact analyses,

promotions, insurance, fund raising, and operations are some points to consider. Tourism may also impact the character of rural communities by creating increased congestion, new tourist developments, and other changes. You need to assess these carefully before you get started.

5. Develop a Marketing Plan: Identify your target customers. Begin by defining the market areas (types of people, geographic areas) where you can attract the most visitors. Then divide the market up by the length of trips that you think people will take. Finally, define the clientele that will be attracted to the community. For example, your community may offer a nature preserve that would appeal to birdwatchers, hiking clubs, etc. When you have determined the market segments, you are ready to create a written marketing plan. This plan helps identify the best combination of marketing strategies, prices, places and promotions to use.

6. Implement the Plan: Once you have established what resources are available and what type of tourism your community wants and needs, you can begin to implement your tourism plan. All interested parties should be actively involved in carrying out the tourism development plan.

7. Monitor/Evaluate Results: Throughout implementation, your community should monitor and evaluate the effects of tourism. This will be a good way to assess whether or not your plan is effective and if tourism is creating the response your community wanted to achieve.

Additional Resources

- State offices of travel and tourism
- State economic development department
- *Tourism Development: A Guideline for Rural Communities*, by Glenn D. Weaver
- *Promoting Tourism in Rural America*, by Dorothy A. Heise, USDA Rural Information Center

Additional copies are available from the Office of Community Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Room 701, 300 7th Street, S.W., Washington, DC 20024 (1-800-645-4712). Copies may also be obtained at

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ocd>